

A BIGGER WOLF PACK

U.S. AND SOUTH KOREAN AIRMEN IN THE SAME DEN

BY STAFF SGT. ALICE MOORE

It doesn't take visitors very long to realize Airmen at Kunsan Air Base, South Korea, have a one-track, wolf-pack mentality.

But that's a good thing for Airmen whose sole job is staying ready to take off in their F-16 Fighting Falcons to deter, protect and defend South Korea from attack.

In that case, the bigger the pack, the bigger the bite.

So when in late 2006 the South Korean air force's 38th Fighter Group switched from flying F-5 Tigers to the Falcon, their American counterparts at the 8th Fighter Wing saw an opportunity to increase the units' combined deterrence value.



Capt. Joshua King wings his F-16 Fighting Falcon back to Kunsan Air Base, South Korea, after a close-air support training mission. American and South Korean airmen are doing more joint training at Kunsan, increasing their combined deterrence value. The captain is with the 80th Fighter Squadron.



Weather technicians Staff Sgt. Miranda Williamson (left) and South Korean Senior Airman Lee Jung-hoon discuss an inbound cold front that could affect flight operations at Kunsan. The sergeant is with the 8th Operations Squadron and the airman with South Korea's 8th Weather Detachment.

The units started to work and train more as one larger pack. "In the past we trained with them (South Koreans) a lot less than we do now," said Col. C. Q. Brown, known by his call sign, "the Wolf."

Colonel Brown should know. He did a tour at "the Kun" as a first lieutenant 20 years ago.

"The U.S.-South Korea alliance has grown stronger. And since now we're both flying the same aircraft, it makes it easier for us to train together," Colonel Brown said. "We see them on a day-to-day basis and work with them on all aspects of our mission."

The days are long at Kunsan, a windswept base on the shores of the Yellow Sea. The operations tempo is high and Airmen are

photo by Senior Airman Steven R. Doty



Airmen from Kunsan's 8th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron move a bomb as a South Korean air force maintenance official judges their work during a joint weapons load competition. Airmen from both air forces have worked together more since the South Korean air force's 38th Fighter Group at the base began flying F-16 Fighting Falcons in 2006. Korean airmen had to learn different loading techniques for their first weapons load competition, which they won.

photo by Staff Sgt Araceli Alarcon



Tech. Sgt. Jason Smith (left) and Airman 1st Class Tyler Brown review an F-4 Phantom training guide with South Korean air force Tech. Sgt. Su Min. Working together helps develop U.S.-South Korean teamwork and warfighting capabilities. The three were training at Chongju Air Base. The Americans are with the 8th Maintenance Group and Sergeant Su is with the 17th Fighter Wing.



Maj. Craig Simmons (standing) briefs (left to right) 1st Lt. Robbie Sandwith and South Korean air force Maj. Park Dae-deo and Capt. Park Ki-ho about a joint training mission. American and South Korean pilots fly joint F-16 Fighting Falcon missions from the base. The joint training gives Airmen from both countries the chance to work and fly together to practice and perfect their warfighting skills. Major Simmons and Captain Sandwith are with Kunsan's 80th Fighter Squadron, and the Koreans with the 11th Fighter Squadron.

constantly training for a mission they hope to never do. American and South Korean airmen fly, train and maintain their jets together.

Falcon pilot Capt. Paul Jelinek flies combined missions with the Korean airmen. He's impressed with the way South Korea's pilots execute tactically. And he knows flying together is something both sides can benefit from.

"It's a great opportunity to mission plan, fly and debrief with the ROKAF (Republic of Korea Air Force). I think every ROKAF and Air Force pilot should have this opportunity," said Captain Jelinek, of the 35th Fighter Squadron.

"We learn from each other on every combined mission. At the end of the day we're all more capable pilots when we walk out the door," the captain said.

Senior Airman Elizabeth Urquia, a weapons load crew member with the 8th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, took part in a weap-

ons load competition against her Korean counterparts. She remembers the Koreans had to learn the Americans' loading techniques before they competed.

"It was interesting to see how they loaded and how they turned everything around to be able to participate," she said. "It was a unique experience — it's not every day you get to compete with airmen from another country."

At the event's end, the South Koreans celebrated a victory.

Working and flying together makes the enlarged pack more capable of maintaining peace and stability throughout the peninsula. Plus, the interaction gives airmen from both countries a better appreciation for each others' capabilities and cultural differences, Colonel Brown said.

"Language and culture are two barriers that could potentially prevent us from being able to execute well in combat," Colonel Brown said. "By interacting socially in a more relaxed environment, it enables both groups to work even better together."

So there are many advantages to having a bigger pack. But the American Airmen are no longer lone wolves. Working together helps both units strengthen the U.S.-South Korea alliance. And the hands-on experience of the day-to-day interaction allows a more cohesive response to any threat.

"So we can be prepared to execute in combat if the need arises," Colonel Brown said.

Col. Chang Young-ik commands the South Korean group. He said Kunsan was a prime place for such training and interaction.

"Kunsan is indeed precious property — the best place for this purpose (interaction)," he said. "As the main force for the defense of the South Korean peninsula, the ROKAF and U.S. Air Force should be able to perform various combined operations in harmony."

And when the enemy is just a short 15-minute Falcon flight from Kunsan, working together gives the combined wolf pack more power — and a lot more bite. 🐺



Joint training is bolstering American (left) and South Korean relations at Kunsan.